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OUR LONDON LETTER.

The London season is practically over, and in this, my first letter, I may perhaps be allowed to look backwards a little, upon what has happened during several months past. One of the most marked effects of the esthetic revival, is a considerable change in the appearance of our streets. Formerly upholsterers' shops were of no particular interest, except to those who were about to buy chairs and tables. They contained furniture of a serviceable but usually of a very ordinary character, and those who wished for antiquarian or artistic pieces had to wander to shops in byways like Wardour Street, where the contents were huddled together without any attempt at arrangement. Now, the chief streets are full of shops containing objects well worthy of a place in an art exhibition, which are set out with taste and effect. At the present moment one of the chief firms in Oxford Street exhibits, in the window, a suite of bedroom furniture in ebony and inlaid ivory, covered with beautiful designs in the best Italian style, a set which would be in place in any artistic collection. As we are on the subject of shops, I may mention an event of some importance, viz.: the sale, by order of the trustees, of the entire stock of Messrs. Jackson & Graham, whose business is now in liquidation. The contents of the well-known shop in Oxford Street are to be sold at a considerable reduction off former prices. Many of the objects are those which have been shown at the Great International Exhibition, and have gained so much credit for the firm. What the character of the stock must be may be gathered from the following prices quoted in the announcement of the sales. An ebony and ivory cabinet is reduced from £4,000 to £1,300, a mantelpiece and chimney furniture of the finest marqueterie is reduced from £2,600 to £1,700, and the "Juno" cabinet from £2,000 to £1,700.

A Decorative Art Exhibition and Oriental Annex has been lately opened in New Bond street for the sale of pictures, sculpture, art furniture, works of art in ceramics, glass, metals, &c., all selected by a committee of taste. The director is Mr. T. J. Gullick.

If I were asked what I considered the prevailing idea which makes the present decorative movement so important and so praiseworthy, I should reply—harmony. Formerly beautiful objects were certainly bought, but they were bought on their own merits alone, without consideration of their surroundings, and the rooms which contained them were often too like museums. Now, every single thing is expected to bear its part in the obtaining of a satisfactory whole. It is a somewhat superficial view to suppose that there is a sameness in the present principles of decoration. The fact that there is great variety was very marked in an Art Furniture Exhibition held last year at the Royal Albert Hall. Here, eleven of the chief London houses, each fitted up a compartment as a sitting room, and the difference of styles, ranging from the most severe to the most ornate, was very marked. It is in this eclecticism that the hope of the stability of the movement must chiefly rest. What is wanted is that we should all give a character to our houses, and not take a ready made taste from our tradesmen. In the complicated life of our time, it becomes more evident every day that it is the consumer who needs education. When he earnestly demands a certain work there are plenty who will produce it for him. Mr. Cave Thomas has lately given point to this by saying, that "demand is the great technical educator, demand made the great art epochs." This may be well illustrated by reference to the condition of the blacksmith's art; we once had a school of workers in iron, whose noble productions are still to be seen occasionally in churches and old mansions, but the art has been allowed to wither and die. Messrs. Gardner have lately organized a loan exhibition of ancient iron-work, which closed in the end of July. Here was not only a feast for the archæologist, but also a delight for the artist who has hope for the future. Besides the old examples, there were a few specimens of modern work which exhibited both skill and originality. Demand for iron-work is setting in. Iron gasoliers and 'electroliers,' as they have been called, are becoming fashionable, and it is satisfactory to know that there are men who can throw an artistic spirit into these things. Such exhibitions as this are valuable, in that they teach the workman to emulate the productions of old artists, but they are still more valuable when they teach the consumer to know good work and to demand it. Another art which is being stimulated at the present time is that of the wood carver. I have now in my eye a very fine and original design for an oak mantel and superstructure,

which is being carried out for one of our richest merchants, and when this is finished I shall hope to describe it more fully.

It is very necessary for us to remember that what we are doing now is a revival, with modifications, of what was done in old days, and that true principles of decoration are not a discovery of our age. Some fine old oak wainscoting has lately been discovered at Kirkles Hall, Clifton, in a rather odd way. A picture-rod was being moved in the dining room, when a wooden plug was found to be loose; this was pulled out and some ornament was noticed behind; a portion of the plaster was then removed when carved pillars and recesses were discovered. This wainscoting, which is of the Elizabethan period, is now entirely exposed. Such ornamentation was better preserved in the country than London, in which city some houses with magnificently panelled rooms have lately been destroyed. A case in which fine decoration had been replaced by poor work has lately come under my notice; a friend who has taken a handsome home in a West End street found that a ceiling in the drawing room, by Angelica Kauffman, was decaying, that ornamental fire places had been cleared away to make place for weak marble ones, and that all the wainscoting had been destroyed. All this vandalism my friend has repaired, and the house is arranged with the greatest taste, so that it probably looks better than it ever did before. Happily much rearrangement in this spirit is now going on in London. A house which no one will regret is fast disappearing. Kensington House, for the erection of which Baron Grant cleared away a whole town, has never been inhabited. No one felt himself rich enough to live in such an enormous building. The contents were first sold in lots, and the marble staircase was bought by the proprietors of Madame Tussaud's waxwork exhibition for about one-sixth of what it cost a few years ago. The ground is so planned out that seventy-five high-class mansions can be built on the site of Kensington House and its gardens.

It is well known that a considerable outcry has lately been made respecting the presence of arsenic in wall papers. The danger from this source has been doubted by some, but several cases of poisoning have been substantiated, chiefly through the persistent agitation of Mr. H. Carr. A committee on poisonous colors, appointed by the Society of Arts, has been sitting for some months, but their report has not yet been published.

The question of ventilation is one which is always being considered, but the chief difficulties connected with it have still to be solved. Several systems by which fresh air is obtained and warmed before it is allowed to enter the room, have been fairly successful, but mostly the systems by which the air from outside is cleansed are too complicated for everyday use. The Smoke Abatement Exhibition has closed, and the medals offered have just been awarded, but nothing very practical has come out of it. London remains, and is likely to remain, as smoky and dirty as ever, and something more than the invention of a new stove is required to free her from fog.

The fogs and the smoke are injurious to health, and all art work suffers by exposure to their influence. An inquiry of some interest in this respect has been raised by the sale of the Beckford library, removed from Hamilton Palace. The question has been asked why the jackets of the books in the Sunderland Collection were almost destroyed, while the Beckford books were uninjured. The answer was this—little care was taken of the books at Blenheim Palace; the sun streaming in at the curtainless windows dried up the leathers, and the careless dusting completed the work of destruction. At Hamilton Palace, on the other hand, the books were protected from the direct rays of the sun; the light was entirely obtained from the ceiling, and came through double ground glass windows; artificial light was not used; the book cases were not glazed or closed in, but a proper ventilation was admitted to the books; the air of the room was carefully regulated as to temperature and dryness.

The best system of artificial lighting has not yet been decided upon. Must we all take to electricity? or are there practical difficulties in the way of such an arrangement? The success of the Electrical Exhibition at the Crystal Palace has induced the managers to propose another. It is arranged that an International Electric and Gas Exhibition shall be held at Sydenham from October, 1882, until Easter, 1883. A Winter Electrical Exhibition is also arranged to be held in the Westminster Aquarium.

I might add much more respecting the various movements in London, if I had not already written overmuch, but I shall hope to deal with some of the subjects necessarily omitted here, in future letters.

COLORINGS.

A room with a cold northern aspect, used in the daytime, should be furnished with objects of light warm tones; while in a room with a southern aspect, light hues of sombre colors may be advantageously employed.

It is well to separate with white, two colors that do not harmonize.

Where the greatest brilliancy and splendor are required, we resort to the contrast produced by complementary colors. Any one familiar with the law of contrast will attain this aim with better success, even with inferior colors, than another, ignorant of the law, could attain with the most brilliant colors.

The ground, as well as the intervals or distance between colored bodies, has some influence on the effect.

In furniture patterns, the opposition of the ground to the prevailing colors of the pattern worked upon it, is too often neglected. For example; if we put a garland of flowers upon a crimson ground, it is necessary that for the most part they be blue, yellow and white, for if we put red flowers upon it, they will appear orange rather than purple; they must be surrounded with green leaves contiguous to the ground. When the ground is greenish, red and pink flowers must predominate over the others. If the ground is of the color of dead leaves, then blue, violet, white and pink flowers will be suited to it.

Each color has many hues developed by admixture with other colors.

In using the primary colors on molded surfaces we should place blue, which retires, on the concave surfaces; yellow, which advances, on the convex; and red, the intermediate color, on the undersides; separating the colors by white.

In the association of two tones of one color the effect will be to lighten the light shade and darken the other.

A white ground has a tendency to make colors upon it appear darker, whilst a black ground has a contrary effect.

We claim, and reason prompts us to believe, that a combination of all the colors of the spectrum produces *white*, but take the same colors in pigments and the result is *gray*.

The only pigment that even approaches purity is ultra marine, and that is marred by a dash of red.

Yellow, Orange, Red, and light Green are known as luminous colors, whereas Blue, Violet and deep Green are called sombre.

Orange is the only color, formed by the composition of two other colors, that cannot become sombre.

Luminous colors are called *warm*, and sombre colors are known as *cold*.

Colors giving a luminous complementary injure black, when opposed to it.

The commingling of the edges of neighboring colors should be avoided, as it destroys the true tone of each.

Ornamental work of one color upon a dissimilar ground should be separated from it by an edging of light, a *contre* when the ground is of gold, the colored figure should have a darker edging.

On a colored ground of any description, gold ornaments should be outlined with black, but on a black or white ground a colored or golden figure requires no outline.

White, gold or black will serve as an edging to any color.

In shades of the same color a light tint on a dark ground requires no outline, but if reversed, the dark ground requires an edging still darker against the light ground.

A decided contrast between colors is a mutual advantage.

A color may be improved by placing it next to white.

Black may be advantageously combined with almost any color.

Gray sets off a color better than either black or white.

White allows each color to preserve its integrity, and even heightens them by contrast, and can never be taken for a color itself.

Different materials, though colored identically the same, present appearance of different shades.

A lined or channeled surface gives depth to color.

Two pure colors adjoining, so influence each other as to create a shade overshadowing the natural color itself.

The shape of an object affects the appearance of its color.

The quality of the light illumining a color affects it.

The fact that incongruous colors are often harmoniously combined in nature, is no guarantee that they may be similarly applied in art.